

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

To best meet the developmental needs of emergent writers, early literacy instruction must include experiences that tap into the interconnected modes of symbolic representation of oral language, drawing, and writing (Dyson 1986; Horn, 2005; Kissel, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). A child's literacy with written text develops through exploring, creating, and imagining her social existence in the varied symbol systems of symbolic play, talk, and drawing (Vygotsky, 1978; Dyson, 1986).

Children are active agents in the formation of unique cultures and spaces and build their identities within them (Cole, 2009). A learning environment created in partnership with the children has the potential to nurture the development of the varied symbol systems of emergent writers (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Ray, 2004; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). The physical space defines the expectations for social interaction, type and quality of work, and level of respect for the varied writing processes of the children (Bruner, 1996; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Ray, 2004; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007).

Theory/Rationale

Emergent Literacy and Social Constructivism

Emergent writers are characterized by their struggles to negotiate the symbolic nature of written language, the connections between print and speech, and the visual aspects of writing (Vygotsky, 1978; Zecker, 1999). From the perspective of developmental cognitive psychology, children actively construct knowledge of their

worlds (Piaget, 1963). Literacy learning, then, emerges from the sociocultural contexts in which children interact through language, drawing, and writing as they learn to interpret symbols and their identities in the social world (Bruner, 1996; Dyson, 1995; 1988). Bruner (1996) explains, “it is culture that provides the tools for organizing and understanding our worlds in communicable ways” (p. 3).

Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978) are responsible for much of the foundational knowledge and theory that has contributed to the literature and study of emergent literacy. Both theorists contend that development is possible because of conflicts arising in a child’s understanding of the world that are resolved through socially constructing new understandings from existing ones. Furthermore, literacy learning is a phenomenon of cognitive development propelled by the negotiation of conflicts through social interaction in oral language, drawing, and symbolic play (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). They diverge, however, in their theories of the specific purposes of play in young children and the types of social interactions that spur development.

Piaget (1962) theorized that symbolic play is a pleasure-seeking activity for children, and does not contribute to the development of new knowledge. However, competence in this type of symbolization is an early predictor of competence in reading and writing text (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993). Piaget viewed reading and writing as similar cognitive processes that develop simultaneously at each developmental stage (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Piaget, 1963).

On the other hand Vygotsky (1978) argued that symbolic play is a manifestation of the conflict that exists where a child's desires are in opposition to societal constraints. Symbolic play is among the first order symbol systems, the others being drawing and oral language. According to Vygotsky (1978), reading and writing are separate processes, where reading and literate writing use second order symbolization with early writing and drawing utilizing first order symbolization. Emergent writers negotiate their texts through time and space, between real and imaginary, all within unique social contexts (Dyson, 1988). Dyson argues that when children are allowed to confer with each other about their texts (drawn or written), and "play" with constructing texts through drawing, they use feedback from their peers and more knowledgeable others to negotiate between real and imaginary worlds. Through this process, emergent writers begin to understand social rules about real versus imaginary storytelling and begin the transition from using drawings to plan their written texts, to drawing as a way to enhance what is already written (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

Children's Geographies

The field of children's geographies can provide insight into creating learning spaces that support emergent literacy and the social construction of knowledge. As a challenge to all stakeholders of public education, "questions need to be asked about how well served children are by their places. When planning human environments, adults have traditionally made assumptions about what children need" (Ellis, 2004, p. 87). Research in the field of children's geographies examines the

sociospatial marginalization of children with the belief that childhood is socially constructed by its existence in time and place, with children acting as independent, active agents in its construction (Cole, 2009).

In western cultures childhood is a socially constructed concept in which children are viewed as either victims or perpetrators of social disorder, marginalized by adult-created environments with adult values (Matthews & Limb, 1999). Adult-created spaces and landscapes intended for children are often neglectful of the needs and desires of the diverse cultures of children. In these environments, “children’s place needs and values are seldom incorporated into the physical planning process and as such children are cast as ‘outsiders’” (Matthews & Limb, 1999, p. 78). Conflicts between adults and children often arise when children’s use of space is in opposition to adult intentions. This conflict is exhibited in classroom learning spaces where children tumble and run in open spaces intended for whole group lessons, or where children escape to hall bathrooms for conversations with friends (Matthews & Limb, 1999). The careful planning and design of learning spaces in collaboration with children can support their unique cultures, the formation of their identities, and ways of making meaning of their worlds (Cole, 2009; Ray, 2004).

Research/Evaluation

The Role of Oral Language for Emergent Writers

For emergent writers “oral language is a cognitive tool used to construct meaning, internalize language used in print, and regulate thought and activity” (Kalmar, 2008, p. 88). Children talk to negotiate ideas and conflicts and develop their

identities within their social worlds (Dyson, 1988; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Piaget (1962) argued that speech of young children ages 3-8 is egocentric speech that serves the child himself as the only audience, and later develops into socialized speech. Egocentric speech is often seen during an emergent writer's composing process as she searches for meaning of her world and ways in which to visually represent that meaning (Dyson, 1983).

In a study titled *The Role of Oral Language in Early Writing Processes*, Dyson (1983) explains that writing requires the young child to manipulate spoken language to graphically represent conceptualized words. This complex task begins with the first order symbol systems in which words, gestures, or drawings represent real objects or events (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, the progression to conventional writing happens when children understand that written symbols can also represent speech itself. Eventually, the need for drawing and "directive" language to plan the writing becomes unnecessary, as the writer understands that written symbols directly represent objects and events (Dyson, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978).

Psycholinguistic theory explains language acquisition as a natural process occurring within varying social contexts where an individual strives to make sense of his/her environment (Smith, 2004). It is a complex system involving one's theory of the world developed by making meaning of contextual experiences. Syntax (the organization of words in speech), semantics (the meanings of words/sentences) and context (the settings in which language occurs) are organized within our theories of the world in general patterns called schemes (Smith, 2004). It is through these

schemes that children are able to learn, communicate, relate to others, problem-solve and explore. “We can use the theory of the world to *predict* the future. This ability to predict is both pervasive and profound, because it is the basis of our comprehension of the world, including our understanding of spoken and written language” (Smith, 2004, p. 23).

When making meaning of spoken language, we require schema about the syntactic structure of language within its cultural context, the situation in which the language is spoken, and the semantics of the language itself (Smith, 2004). Smith explains that schemas are only useful when we activate them in the activity of prediction, which involves our expectations about meaning based on prior knowledge. “Prediction is the basis of comprehension, and all children who can understand the spoken language of their own environment must be experts at prediction” (Smith, 2004, p. 168).

In her essay on Transactional Theory, Rosenblatt (2005) explains that, although language is socially generated, it always occurs within a transaction of a person with his/her environment. Language only makes sense in specific contexts. As the contexts change, so do the meanings of words. Words have a shared public meaning, but also have a private meaning, as we all have different experiences in obtaining the meanings of words. “The human being is seen as part of nature, continuously in transaction with an environment - each one conditions the other” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 3). Within any transaction in the environment emergent writers make sense of the

experience by drawing on schema for that situation and synthesizing it with the new information to create new understandings (Rosenblatt, 2005; Smith, 2004).

The Role of Drawing for Emergent Writers

According to Vygotsky (1978), drawing is graphic speech, a first order symbolism that spans the development from dramatic play and oral language to writing. A child's first marks through drawing are an extension of gestures, what Vygotsky appoints "the first representation of meaning" (p. 110). During the development of oral language, children must translate sensory images into speech (Caldwell & Moore, 1991). Once oral language has progressed and become habitual, children begin to use drawing as graphic speech as they struggle to represent what they know about their worlds (Vygotsky, 1978). Drawing allows emergent writers to use a familiar symbol system to reduce the processing demands of representing sensory images from thought to language to writing (Caldwell & Moore, 1991; Zecker, 1999). It is this level of drawing as representation that leads emergent writers into the second order symbolism of conventional writing (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978).

When emergent writers draw, they are composing ideas about what they remember and understand about their worlds (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Drawing is writing. Critical thinking and decision making for drawing and writing follow similar processes as emergent writers compose and revise for meaning and clarification (Kissel, 2008; Ray, 2010). Graphic representation through drawing allows children to understand their power to communicate, and the

need for their representation to be readable by others (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998). In their desire to communicate graphically, children use drawing as a much clearer and simpler mode than the written word (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998).

As explained by Bruner (1996), symbolism is the representation of the reality that is shared among members of a cultural community. This symbolism is “conserved, elaborated, and passed on to succeeding generations, who, by virtue of this transmission, continue to maintain the culture’s identity and way of life” (p. 3). Supporting the use of multiple symbol systems in emergent writers will develop literacy in multiple text forms (images, traditional writing and language) in the varied contexts they may encounter (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Whitmore, Martens, Goodman & Owocki, 2005). As emergent writers talk and draw to express meaning within their unique cultures, they have great power to define, maintain, and transform the identity of that culture and their own identities within it (Bruner, 1996; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).

For emergent writers talking while drawing helps them to remain focused and elaborate on the ideas about which they are drawing (Oken-Wright, 1998). Children may talk before they draw or write as a way of planning, or they may begin drawing and announce later what they have drawn (Oken-Wright, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Talking while composing is evidence of the child’s thinking (Dyson, 1986)). It might take the form of egocentric speech, in which the child is practicing or rehearsing her concept of the world (Piaget, 1962). Or, it may materialize as socialized speech that

engages a peer or more knowledgeable other in the learning community (Oken-Wright, 1998; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978).

When the learning environment invites children to draw and write together, the act of composing engages meaningful social experiences around which children can experiment with ideas and language, struggle together with concepts and identity, and negotiate the disequilibrium between their real and imaginary worlds (Dyson, 1988; Piaget, 1962; Oken-Wright, 1998; Whitmore, et al, 2005). Interactions with teachers and peers during the composing process leads emergent writers to reenvision/revise their texts as they synthesize new information in the construction of meaning and the communication of that meaning to others (Kissel, 2008). It is this way of working that scaffolds the emergent writer in her development from identifying and labeling objects/events through drawing to the desire to communicate that meaning to others (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

As emergent writers begin to include letters to represent initial sounds and words to support their drawings, they begin the transition to the second order symbolism of written language (Kissel, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). They are still dependent on talking and drawing to plan and revise their thinking until they are able to simply write conventional text to represent their thoughts/language and forego the intermediary step of drawing (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). At this stage of development, drawing becomes a way to enhance what has already been written, much like picture books and illustrated informational texts (Ray, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Through opportunities with drawing, emergent writers are able to gain control

over the planning, organizing, and composing process that lead to conventional writing (Caldwell & Moore, 1991; Horn, 2005; Kissel, 2008).

When faced with writing tasks that fall outside of their existing schema for text structure, context, or content, emergent writers will often resort to drawing to bridge the gaps (Zecker, 1999). Engaging emergent writers in a variety of writing tasks allows the teacher to get a more complete picture of each writer's understandings about written language, genre, and the use of other symbols across contexts (Kissel, 2008; Whitmore et al, 2005; Zecker, 1999).

The Role of the Environment

A sociocultural context. Rosenblatt (2005) stresses that each individual's organizing frameworks or schema are developed within a social context in which socioeconomic and cultural factors play a role in influencing behaviors, concepts, and identities about reading and writing. She goes on to suggest that the growth of children as readers and writers should be nurtured at all developmental levels in environments that allow children to build upon their rich experiences in their unique sociocultural contexts. Nurturing this growth means, again, providing authentic purposes for reading and writing, opportunities for on-going dialogue with peers about texts, and diverse texts in which the child can identify with the author and/or characters/content (Kalmar, 2008; Norton-Meier, 2005; Rosenblatt, 2005).

Norton-Meier (2005) described her challenges as a teacher in developing inquiry-based curriculum that supports and builds upon the children's questions of the world and the problems they are negotiating within and between their worlds, inside

and outside of school. She tells of an experience that challenges her to consider the lives of her students outside the classroom and real world literacy. In their homes and communities children are literate in the complex spoken languages specific to their cultures, environmental print, and many varied messages and demonstrations about literacy. Norton-Meier goes on to say that the classroom environment must be a place where children's lives, the school, and the community overlap in deliberate ways.

Vygotsky (1978) and Smith (2004) contend that learning to master reading and writing happens in much the same way as mastering spoken language: through meaningful experiences within the child's environment. These meaningful experiences can take the form of dramatic play or drawing in which children explore literacy stances, demonstrate and develop their literacy knowledge, and lead to more advanced thinking (Whitmore, Martens, Goodman & Owocki, 2005). The conditions under which children learn anything, including conventional writing, are meaningful contexts in which to generate and test hypotheses (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, meaningful contexts are defined by the children who engage within them (Ellis, 2004).

The experiences of children cannot be separated from time and space (Greenman, 1988). According to Greenman (1988), children form attachments to places and spaces as they have experiences within them. The learning environment includes the physical space, the tools afforded for learning within that space, the ways in which time is structured, and the roles children assume while interacting there (Bruner, 1996; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Greenman, 1988; Ray, 2004).

Places and spaces have the potential to offer a sense of belonging and an overall sense of meaning to life, security and opportunities for growth and creative self-development (Ellis, 2004).

Socialization messages. Despite postmodern influences on curricula and instructional practices, school learning spaces for children often project adult values and socialization messages for the preparation of the movement of children into adulthood (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001). In a study conducted in 64 classrooms in southern California, Brint, Contreras and Matthews (2001) examined the socialization messages communicated to students through direct teacher-student interactions, class rules, school-wide curricular programs, and the use of public space in visual displays and oral rituals. This research indicated that teacher-student interactions, class rules, and school-wide curricular programs placed great emphasis on the values of orderliness and hard work. Postmodern values such as multiculturalism, individual uniqueness, and choice accounted for less than one percent of the coded messages in the study. Organizational priorities within the schools (i.e. competition over test scores and funding) determine the messages being sent and redefine values to fit their objectives (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001).

The global educational reform movement has led American education policy makers to focus on data and competition. Most schools have turned to business models driven by outcomes and quantifiable data (Sahlberg, 2011), leading to intensified standardized testing of children in areas of literacy and numeracy. This, in turn, has resulted in the standardization of teaching and learning, changing

administrative ideologies and a return to traditional teacher-centered instruction, and the continued decline of America's ability to compete on international assessments (OECD, 2009).

Regardless of social reform and educational research, educational reform efforts and funding gaps continue to restrict the contributions of American children to their own learning (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The achievement gap that exists in the academic performance of America's children (i.e. the disparity between the achievement of minority and poor students and their white counterparts) has drawn concern from many educational researchers and civil rights activists. Ladson-Billings (2006) presents an analogy that likens the achievement gap with the national debt. The achievement gap is an "education debt" comprised of the accumulation of all of the educational injustices that have been unresolved since the formation of the first American public schools. The author argues that "the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an education debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5). In the lives of both rich and poor children, decisions and policies over education have shaped the public image of children and rendered them powerless in their own educational experience (Ellis, 2004), thus contributing to the "moral debt" owed to children (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 8).

Cultures that value collaboration, creativity, and innovation exhibit those ideals in their school environments. The early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia, Italy were built after careful collaboration around common goals and principles

defined by research, community culture, and beliefs about children (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). The environment is highly regarded as the “third teacher,” in which children interact with it, define it, and transform it. The environment also has the power of transformation, as children form their identities within it (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). When considering the instructional methods to support and develop the potentials of emergent writers, teachers must also consider the power and potential of the learning environment as it impacts the processes and identities of young writers (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Ray, 2004).

Finnish schools have been successful in rising to the top during the 21st century global educational reform movement (Sahlberg, 2011). According to Sahlberg (2011), Finland has embraced constructivist learning pedagogies that empower children and assign high levels of respect for teachers, administrators and children. Like the early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia, Finnish schools study child/environment interactions and seek input from children about their learning environments (Kangas, 2010). Examination of various learning environments both inside and outside of schools continues to inform the theories and practices of Finnish schools and learning spaces. With active roles in the design and creation of learning spaces, children display positive outcomes in their overall physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and mental well being (Cole, 2009). Finnish educators understand that “if the objective is to construct school environments based on theories of learning that embrace and enact democratic principles, then student involvement should be both genuine and sustained” (Kangas, 2010, p. 208).

The Role of the Teacher

Setting the stage. Children are experts at “reading” the world around them (Smith, 2004). In a learning environment, messages are sent about what happens there, who is welcome to use that space, the value and nature of relationships between those interacting there, how your body should move, the tone of voice and type of talk that occurs there, the roles that might be played, and myriad other messages (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001; Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998). Those messages are sent by many elements that may exist in the learning environment, including: the tools and materials, visual messages containing rules or procedures, the arrangement of furniture, lighting, open versus closed space, and so on (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998).

To communicate a high value of the work of emergent writers, a teacher would provide easy access to tools and writing materials that support their modes of symbolic representation (Baghban, 2007; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2010). Their roles as knowers, doers, and writers are defined by objects and resources that exist in the learning space (Bruner, 1996). Just like a hammer invites one to be a builder, high quality drawing books, notebooks, markers, pencils, and books invite one to be a writer (Bruner, 1996; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Kalmar, 2008).

In the early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia, Italy, children are believed to have many “languages” through which they symbolically represent their understandings, ideas, plans, realities, and imaginary worlds (Edwards, Gandini &

Forman, 1998). These authors explain that the many modes of symbolic representation used by children are languages through which they can communicate, and fall within the first order symbolization described by Vygotsky (1978). This perspective guides the teachers in their choices of materials and tools for the learning spaces within the schools, which may include drawing and writing materials, clay, wire, blocks, props for dramatic play, shadow screens, and many others (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). Opportunities with media in addition to drawing materials opens the doors for emergent writers to more deeply negotiate their ideas, theories and identities, as they transition to traditional writing (Horn, 2005; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

A partnership with the children in the design and use of the space honors place needs and values, their role in the learning community, and the sociocultural nature of symbolization (Cole, 2009; Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998; Matthews & Limb, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). When learning about written language, children watch the “demonstrations” of others about what written language is, for what and when it is used, and who uses it (Smith, 2004). Spaces that nurture these “demonstrations” would include quiet spaces for two or three children, round tables where small groups can meet and discuss their compositions, and large group meeting areas for teacher/child modeling or for the whole class to share and celebrate together (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998; Smith, 2004; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). The provision of spaces that encourages talk during composition allows emergent writers

to engage in problem solving around social rules and real versus imaginary storytelling (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

A learning environment where written language is interesting and accessible to all children is necessary in forming children's identities of themselves as readers and writers (Smith, 2004). Emergent writers will internalize what they see in the work of others (Ray, 2004). Though they may not be fully able to articulate what or why, emergent writers will begin to incorporate elements such as craft and conventions into their writing as they construct new understandings (Bruner, 1996; Ray, 2004).

Making visible the past and present lives of the children, both inside and outside of the classroom, honors their social existence unconstrained by time (Dyson, 1986; Norton-Meier, 2005). Children do not just exist in the present, rather they have pasts, presents, and dreams for the future (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). In Reggio Emilia the image of the child "is one that places the child within the context of history - both personal, lived history, and the heritage of one's culture and society" (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998, p. 307). It is through this visible history that children can identify meaningful contexts for talking, drawing, and writing by reliving their pasts, imagining the pasts of others, reflecting on the present, and imagining what could be (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

Nurturing development through storytelling and drawing. In a study titled *The Impact of No Child Left Behind on Teachers' Writing Instruction*, McCarthy (2008) found that teachers in high-income, high-performing schools did not feel any

direct effects from the law, and continued to teach how they chose, mostly through a writing workshop approach. As described in the study, the children who attended those schools were well prepared, and overall, always scored well on tests. In contrast teachers at low-income schools felt the impact on their everyday lives and instruction with pressure to raise test scores. Teachers at the low-income schools reported cuts in recess and programming, such as art and social studies. Writing instruction focused on preparing students for the standardized test through packaged curricula abandoning daily writing instruction altogether (McCarthy, 2008).

In a writing workshop approach, writers choose their topics, write during regularly structured writing time, engage in extensive talk about their work with both peers and knowledgeable others, and experience mini-lessons focused on various writing topics (Horn, 2005; Ray, 2004). This format of writing instruction provides the elements of writing development necessary for emergent writers by incorporating meaningful contexts (choice and conversation), social construction of knowledge through oral and written language, and scaffolding by more knowledgeable peers and adults (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). Packaged curricula, as described in McCarthy's study (2008), do little to nurture the need for meaningful contexts, do not honor the lives and identities of the writers, and do not scaffold the needs of the emergent writer through the transition from drawing to writing text (Cooper, Capo, Mathes & Gray, 2007; Kalmar, 2008; McCarthy, 2008; Dyson, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978).

Oral storytelling by the children provides built-in meaningful contexts about what to draw and write (Horn, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). Horn (2005) argues that making opportunities for telling stories during writing time is necessary for emergent writers to begin the composing process. Martha Horn believes that oral storytelling places the focus on the child (the author), validating her life and experiences. Additionally, storytelling acknowledges “the important place of oral language in learning to write” (p. 35) and provides “the opportunity to teach the craft of writing before our students can write” (p. 36). The co-construction of oral stories with emergent writers honors their desire to share and makes known the role of the audience, as the teacher (and other children) listen, give feedback, clarify for meaning and understanding, and ask questions (Horn, 2005; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). Furthermore, English Language Learners benefit from storytelling, as they experience increased access to narrative language and share their rich cultural identities (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Whitmore et al, 2005).

As emergent writers understand the use of visual symbols as graphic speech, they begin to compose their stories through drawing (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). A writing workshop approach supports the use of storytelling and drawing as part of the composing process (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2010). Mini-lessons can take the form of illustration study, where the children reflect on and revise their drawn compositions (Ray, 2010). Ray defines drawing and writing as parallel processes, where each strives for the sophisticated communication of meaning through prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Children will often write

about the same topics again and again, each time making small changes to style, adding details, letters, and other marks (Kissel, 2008). Labeled and captioned pictures can later become elaborate stories when children are allowed to return to familiar topics and ideas (Baghban, 2007). Ray (2010) advocates for the acknowledgement of drawing as composition, in which deep work is scaffolded through sophisticated tools, adequate time, rich dialogue, and teaching “into” illustration. Ray (2010) boldly states, “for children to grow up as writers under the care of teachers, those teachers must teach them how to show up and move forward, how to be both the boat and the wind for their forward motion as writers” (p. 21).

Summary

The role of teachers of emergent writers is to provide opportunities for the their natural literacy development as they struggle to transition from first order symbolization to second order symbolization (Ray, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Instructional methods that focus on procedural skills, leaving little time for meaningful composition, do not develop critical thinking skills and ignore the unique needs and cultures of children (Kalmar, 2008; Neuman & Roscos, 2005; McCarthy, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Early literacy instruction that honors the lives and cultures of children includes opportunities for creative expression of thought through drawing, as they learn the role of symbolic representation in literacy (Horn, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

Deep, meaningful literacy learning is scaffolded in meaningful contexts (Vygotsky, 1978), which are necessary for emergent writers as they learn the role of

oral and written language as tools for communicating in their socio-cultural worlds (Dyson, 1988; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). Teachers that provide time for collaborative oral storytelling, drawing and writing understand and utilize the varied ways of knowing that children bring to their own literacy learning as their lives weave in and out of the classroom (Dyson, 1986; Horn, 2005; Norton-Meier, 2005; Whitmore et al, 2005). Making visible their past and present work, and private and home lives within the learning environment places children in the midst of their holistic realities as members of the larger society (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).

Ignoring the distinctive space needs of children leads to conflict and denies emergent writers a voice in their own learning community (Cole, 2009; Matthews & Limb, 1999). In contrast, partnership with children in the design, structure and use of their learning spaces supports collaboration with peers and honors their roles and changing identities (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).

Oral storytelling and drawing within the context of a writing workshop approach scaffolds the emergent writer in her transition from talking to drawing to conventional writing (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2010). The negotiation of symbolic representation within these three modes is scaffolded through extensive interactions with peers and knowledgeable others, resulting in deepened understandings of symbolization (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Oken-Wright, 1998; Ray, 2004, 2010; Whitmore et al, 2005). Drawing and writing are parallel processes in the sophisticated task of communicating meaning (Ray, 2010).

Conclusions

Emergent writers become deeply literate when their natural literacy development is scaffolded through oral storytelling and drawing. The careful collaboration and design of learning spaces can provide meaningful contexts for children to share what they know and develop their unique identities as writers in their complex socio-cultural worlds. Rather than relying on pre-packaged curricula and center-stage teaching, teachers and administrators must understand how to become partners and facilitators with emergent writers through watching, listening, and learning alongside them.